

higher concentration of mold spores in the environment.

A most interesting possibility is raised by the Novey and Wells paper. Having identified ABPA as an important disease in California, it would be of interest if Dr. Novey was informed of how many further cases of ABPA were identified in the western states by the thousands of physicians who have read *THE WESTERN JOURNAL OF MEDICINE* and his report.

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Of Cults and Armageddon

THE RECENT gruesome events at Jonestown in Guyana remind us how little we understand about some aspects of human nature and human behavior. How more than 900 persons of all ages could engage in a planned, even rehearsed, ritual of murder and suicide defies comprehension in our present state of knowledge. As far as is known such an occurrence on such a scale is unprecedented in modern times. The awful thought arises that what has happened once can happen again, perhaps on an even larger scale, unless somehow we can gain a better understanding of this human aberration, and find better means of detecting it in an early stage and instituting effective prevention.

It is not really known whether there is some inborn weakness or defect which may make some persons susceptible and others not, whether there is something about a person's life experience or whether there is a form of psychological contagion which in a sense might infect persons. In some individual instances of murder and suicide insanity clearly plays a role, but not in all. There are instances in which both killing and suicide are rational acts—in self-defense or to avoid further suffering that is simply unbearable, for example. But neither individual insanity in so many persons at one time and in one place, or murder and suicide as rational acts, seem adequate to explain the horror of Jonestown. It seems

that there must have been some element of contagious aberration which so affected more than 900 persons that they saw this evidently planned and to us unbelievable ritual of murder and suicide as, for them, a rational and presumably necessary act.

In this context one cannot help but think of the murderous atrocities perpetrated against the Jewish people in Hitler's Germany and the ultimate apparent suicide of the leader of the Nazi cult. Germany and the German people had seemed to be among the most sane and rational of peoples and yet they were somehow swept along by a charismatic and irrational leader who imposed his murderous irrationality upon that apparently most civilized nation. One cringes at the thought of what might have happened had that leader, who by this time was obviously insane, been in possession of the power to make his suicide global by pressing a button that would have released a holocaust of worldwide nuclear destruction. In such a circumstance, which we understand is technically possible today, Armageddon could be a reality.

Cults tend to form around charismatic leaders and charismatic leaders are often somehow not like other people. There is an infectiousness in their leadership that spreads among their followers and gives them power which can extend to life and death for their followers and for others. Perhaps the Jonestown experience is telling us something. It could be a warning that unless we find ways to understand the murderous and suicidal aberrations that can occur in charismatic leaders and their cults, find better means for their early diagnosis, and discover how to institute timely and effective prevention or countermeasures, Armageddon might just happen as a result of this poorly understood human aberration in persons in positions of great power. It would seem none too soon to begin the process of more certain prevention of this unthinkable but nevertheless quite possible circumstance.

—MSMW

Intussusception

THIS ISSUE of the *WESTERN JOURNAL* contains a Specialty Conference on the important topic of intussusception, to which this editorial will refer.

There will be general agreement today that a barium enema study is the conclusive diagnostic test when intussusception is suspected and that it should be undertaken in the expectation of apply-